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Virtue *and* Vice *the great Cauſes of the publick Happineſs and Miſery of Nations.*

A

SERMON

PREACHED at the

ASSIZES

HELD at

NORTHAMPTON,

AUGUST 1, 1739.

BEFORE

The RIGHT HONOURABLE

The Lord Chief Juſtice Willes,

AND

Mr. Juſtice Probyn.

By THOMAS HOLME,

Curate of Wellingborough, *and Chaplain to the Right Hon. the Earl of* Hume.

Publiſhed at the Requeſt of the High Sheriff, and the Gentlemen of the Grand Jury.

NORTHAMPTON:

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MUSEUM BRITANNICUM

TO

CHARLES EDWIN, *Esq;*

High Sheriff of the County of *Northampton*;

AND TO

The Gentlemen of the Grand Jury,

The HONOURABLE

Sir *William Humble*,
AND
Sir *Edward Pickering*, } Barts.

Thomas Samwell,
Elmes Stinkes,
John Tryon,
John Parkhurſt,
Smith Fleetwood,
Rich. Backwell,
Barthol. Tate,
Henry Lawton,
Thomas Langton, } Eſqs.

Chriſto. Rigby,
John Ball,
Humph. Orme,
John Orme,
George Hill,
Tho. Hawley,
Tho. Brudenell,
John Hunt, } Eſqs.

GENTLEMEN,

THE kind Acceptance the following Diſcourſe met with from the Pulpit, and the

the uncommon Honour done it by my Lord Chief Juſtice, in taking Notice thereof, in ſuch a publick Manner, in his excellent Charge, would not have prevailed upon me to make it publick, had not your joint Requeſt obliged me to it. I am very ſenſible, it will expoſe me to the Cenſure of many; but its Fate I ſhall not much be concerned about, if it may in any wiſe contribute to the Advancement of *Religion*, and the declining Cauſe of *Virtue*: This was the End aimed at by me in preaching, as I doubt not

not but you had the ſame in cauſing it to be publiſh'd: That it may anſwer theſe good Intentions, is the hearty Deſire of,

GENTLEMEN,

Your moſt Obedient,

Humble Servant,

Tho. Holme.

Wellingborough, Aug. 6, 1739.

not but your bad the fame in
causing it to be publish'd:
That it may answer thele
good Intentions, is the hearty
Desire of,

GENTLEMEN,

Your most Obedient,

Humble Servant,

The Volume.

PROV. XIV. 34.

Righteouſneſs exalteth a Nation; but Sin is a Reproach to any People.

HAPPINESS is the natural Deſire of all Mankind, and to obtain it the End and Reſult of all their Purſuits: Every one courts it in ſome Shape or other, and lays himſelf out with great Eagerneſs in procuring what he apprehends will make him happy. Only the Misfortune is, Men are very apt to miſtake the proper Object of their Happineſs, and, either thro' the Prevalence of Senſe over Reaſon, or for want of due Conſideration about the Conſequences of their Choice, commonly miſplace their Affections upon ſuch Things, as are utterly inſufficient to yield them that compleat Satisfaction they expected: And thus they run out their Lives in endleſs and vain Projects, 'till at laſt they are convinced, to their Sorrow, that a perfect and ſubſtantial Happineſs is not to be

found in any of the Things of this World, and that they have been only purſuing Shadows, and embracing Deluſion.

But tho' Men are convinced of the unſatisfying Emptineſs there is in all ſublunary Enjoyments; yet in the Infancy of Life, all our Affairs and Concerns being entirely under the Conduct and Management of Senſe, this gives it ſuch a ſtrong Influence, eſpecially at our firſt ſetting out into the World, that we are very apt to be much governed by it all our Lives after: And beſides, this World is plentifully furniſhed with Variety of Objects ſuited to each Man's particular Taſte; ſenſual Gratifications are always near at hand, they offer preſent Poſſeſſion, and promiſe immediate Satisfaction; and therefore it is no Wonder, that Men's moſt earneſt Purſuits are generally after a temporal and preſent Felicity. Hence alſo it comes to paſs, that the Arguments drawn from the Happineſs or Miſery of a future State loſe all their Force and Influence, when compared with preſent ſenſual Pleaſures; and are quite diſregarded, when they ſtand in Competition with that Happineſs which this World promiſes the immediate Enjoyment of.

Discourse with the Tongues of Men and Angels of the Joys of Heaven, and of thoſe ineſtimable Pleaſures which are at God's Right Hand for ever; ſuch Diſcourſes are entertained only as fine Talk, but make no laſting Impreſ-

ſion.

sion. And on the other Hand, the most awful Description of the Torments of Hell, and those dreadful Scenes of Horror and Despair reserved for Sinners in another World, lose all their Force when represented at a Distance, because the Attention is entirely taken up with Views of a nearer Kind.

THUS then being the Case, that the Generality of Mankind are for making the best of the present; and since neither infinite Happiness, nor Misery in Reversion, are able to make Men extend their Hopes and Fears to another World, because their Thoughts are chiefly employed about the Affairs of this; it may not be altogether unseasonable, to recommend *Virtue* and *Religion*, upon the Foot of temporal Advantage in this present Life, by shewing how much the Belief and Practice thereof contribute to the Peace and Happiness of publick Societies, in which every private Man's Happiness is in a great Measure comprized.

THAT *Virtue* will make a Nation prosperous, and *Vice* the contrary, is the Doctrine laid down in the Text; and it is not the Assertion of a melancholy, half-witted Philosopher, who takes Things upon Trust, as he has met with them in his Reading; neither is it the Assertion of a self-interested Priest, who lives by praising *Virtue*, and declaiming against *Vice*; nor is it the Declaration of an aged and impotent Cynick,

who (as the fine Gentlemen are apt to object) uſually rails againſt thoſe Pleaſures and Enjoyments which he is unable to procure, or for which he hath loſt all Taſte and Reliſh: But it is the Aſſertion of the moſt magnificent Prince, the greateſt experimental Philoſopher, the wiſeſt Stateſman, and profoundeſt Politician that ever was; a Prince, who neither wanted Wealth nor Capacity to furniſh him with ſuitable Expedients to find out true Happineſs; and yet this great Prince, after a laborious Search, and thorough Experiment, of the three great Idols of the World, Riches, Honour, and Pleaſure, ſums them all up under the Title of *Vanity and Vexation of Spirit*; (*a*) pronounces that *Religion*, and *the Fear of God*, is the only true Wiſdom, that can make a Man compleatly happy; (*b*) and that whoever *purſues Wickedneſs, purſueth it to his own Death*: (*c*) And this he affirms to be true, not only with regard to each Man's particular Intereſt, ſingly conſidered, but alſo with regard to Nations and publick Societies. *Righteouſneſs* (ſaith he) *exalteth a Nation; but Sin is a Reproach to any People.*

The Words are in themſelves ſo plain, that they need no Explication; only it may be proper to obſerve, that in treating thereupon, I ſhall not confine myſelf to ſpeak of *Righteouſneſs* in its ſtrict Senſe, as it imports Juſtice between Man and Man; tho' in this Senſe *Solomon*'s

(*a*) *Eccleſ.* i. 14. (*b*) *Eccleſ.* xii. 13. (*c*) *Prov.* xi. 19.

Solomon's Assertion is very true; but will consider it more largely, as comprehending the Whole of Religion: And in this Sense, I suppose, it is every where in Scripture understood, when opposed to *Sin* in general.

The Text then contains these two following Propositions:

1. That a general Belief and Acknowledgment of the Principles of Religion, and the Practice of its Precepts, in a Course of Piety and Virtue, are the only Means of making a Nation happy and prosperous. And,

2. That publick Misery is the certain and necessary Consequence of Irreligion and Wickedness.

The Heads of my Discourse shall be,

I. To endeavour, by proper Arguments, to prove the Truth of the foregoing Propositions. And,

II. To draw an useful Inference or two from what I shall deliver under the preceding Head.

I. I am to endeavour to prove, that a general Belief and Acknowledgment of the Principles of Religion, and the Practice of its Precepts,

cepts, in a Courſe of Piety and Virtue, are the only Means of making a Nation happy and proſperous: And, on the contrary, that publick Miſery is the certain and neceſſary Conſequence of Irreligion and Wickedneſs.

The Truth of this will plainly appear, if we conſider the natural Tendency of Religious Principles in general, and of particular Virtues and Vices; the conſtant Methods of the Divine Providence; and the Hiſtory and Experience of Nations.

1. I will conſider the natural Tendency of Religious Principles in general.

Now that the Belief of a God, a Providence, and a future State, and the other great Articles of Religion, are very uſeful and neceſſary for the Security of Government, and the Good of Society, is a Truth, which wiſe and thinking Men in all Ages have acknowledged. The Advocates of Religion have always recommended it to the World upon this very Account; and even its profeſſed Enemies ſufficiently acknowledge its good Influence, when they tell us, that it was firſt contrived by ſome cunning Politician, as an Engine of State, to keep the World under the Awe of Government, and is ſtill countenanced and kept up for the ſame Purpoſe. And indeed this Belief and Acknowledgment is ſo abſolutely neceſſary, if not for conſtituting, yet at leaſt for preſerving, good Order

Order among Men, that without it Government would be the moſt unſtable, tottering Thing in the World. For tho' it ſhould be granted, that the common Neceſſities of Human Nature, and the Miſchiefs which muſt unavoidably ariſe from a State of Anarchy and Confuſion, would probably make Men aſſociate together for their mutual Defence, and compel them into ſome Kind of Order; yet ſtill if the Belief of a God, and all Expectations of future Rewards and Puniſhments, were entirely taken away, Human Laws would be found very inſufficient to ſecure the Peace and good Order of Society, in this degenerate State of Human Nature. For ſuppoſing the World to be under no Awe from Religious Principles, every one then would neceſſarily be governed by ſome darling Appetite, or predominant Paſſion, to which every Action and Purſuit of Life would be made ſubſervient; and ſure we can hardly imagine a Society more miſerable, and in which there would be greater Outrages committed, and more Confuſion, than in one compoſed of ſuch Members, as were all entirely under the Dominion of their Luſts and Paſſions; becauſe, that Faculty of Reaſon, which, when it is the ruling Principle, ſo juſtly exalts Man above the Brute Part of the Creation, would, in ſuch Caſe, only furniſh him with an Ability of being more extenſively miſchievous than the fierceſt Brute in Nature; and conſequently it would be more eligible to live in a Deſart, and leſs dangerous to ſubſiſt among a Foreſt of wild Beaſts,

Beaſts, than in ſuch a wretched Society as this.

Upon this Suppoſition, the *Governing* Part of Mankind, being armed with Power, (which is but too apt to make Men inſolent) would have no Obligation to reſtrain them from the moſt lawleſs Abuſe of it; but would be continually prompted by their Luſts to Practices of the utmoſt Cruelty and Oppreſſion: Neither would the *Governed* have any Principle that could be depended on, to keep them within the Limits of their Duty and Subjection: But as the former would always be Tyrants; ſo the latter would rebel, as oft as they could hope to do it with Impunity.

But if it ſhould be allowed, that the Magiſtrates in ſuch a Society, would, without Religion, be inclined to be juſt and equal in all their Adminiſtrations, and that they would reſiſt all Temptations to Injuſtice and Oppreſſion; and were the Laws a great deal more compleat and comprehenſive, than Human Laws were ever yet found to be; ſuppoſe there were a particular Law for every poſſible Caſe that could happen, and an adequate Penalty for every Offence; yet ſtill, private Villains would have nothing to reſtrain them from ſecret Contrivances of Wickedneſs; potent Sinners and large Confederacies of wicked Men might ſafely defy the Reſentment of the Magiſtrate, and would be ſcreened from Puniſhment by their Power and

and Numbers. Neither could Laws, how good ſoever in themſelves, be put in Execution, nor Juſtice be adminiſtred, with any Certainty, by the moſt upright Magiſtrate, among a People deſtitute of Religion: Becauſe, he would want a diſtinguiſhing Mark, whereby to judge of the Truth and Falſhood of Evidence; and an Oath, which is now looked upon as ſacred, *a Confirmation to put an End to all Strife*, (*a*) would then give no Security, nor be of any Credit.

Nay, I cannot ſee how Civil Government could at all ſubſiſt without Religion; or what Principle could be invented in its Stead, ſufficient to create a rational Ground for mutual Truſt and Confidence among Men: And yet without ſuch a common Principle, whoſe Influence is univerſal, it is certain nothing would enſue but continual Diſorder: For when the Members of Society are jealous one of another, when each Man has Reaſon to believe, that his Neighbour has no Conſcience; that he holds no Principles, but Self-Intereſt; nor is governed by any other Law, but preſent Satisfaction; this mutual Diſtruſt will naturally engage them in a State of War, and Confuſion. So that were Mankind ſet free from all Kind of Religious Obligations, they would be ready to commit every Kind of Wickedneſs; and there would be nothing of ſufficient Force to

(*a*) *Heb.* vi. 16.

reſtrain them from Acts of the greateſt Cruelty, and Outrage, if they did but contribute to the Satisfaction of their Luſts, and the Gratification of their reigning Appetites.

That this would unavoidably be the Caſe, is but too manifeſt from Experience: The general Occaſions of theſe Solemnities, and the Frequency of publick Executions, are a plain Demonſtration of the great Degeneracy of Human Nature, of the Inſufficiency of the ſevereſt Temporal Puniſhments, for keeping wicked Men within the Bounds of Moderation, and of the abſolute Neceſſity there is, to call in Religion to the Aid of Human Laws. For we ſee, when Men have once abandoned all Principles of Conſcience, and ſhook off the Dread of another World, to what a ſtupendous Pitch of Wickedneſs they generally arrive; how they deſtroy their Health by Luſt and Intemperance; and rather than want a Supply for their Luſts, how they can prevail with themſelves to invade the Rights and Properties of others; to be guilty of all Kinds of Frauds, and Perjuries; to commit Theft, Robbery, and Murder; and are content to riſque the Forfeiture of every Thing that ought to be dear to them, their Reputations, their Eſtates, their Liberties, and even their Lives, to ſatisfy the Cravings of their exorbitant Appetites. Thus by breaking down the Fences of Religion, Society would likewiſe be disbanded, Govern-

ment

ment would fly in Pieces, and Mankind be involved in Misery and Ruin.

Whereas on the contrary, when Civil Government is establiſhed upon the Baſis of Religion; then is the greateſt Security for mutual Truſt, and Confidence given, to all the Members of Society; then is the ſureſt Foundation of Peace and Happineſs laid, both for Prince and People. For when Magiſtrates, whom the Scripture ſtiles *Gods upon Earth*, (*a*) are conſcious to themſelves, that there is a God in Heaven, to whom they are accountable for all their Actions; this Principle will make them equal and moderate in their Adminiſtrations, and act in every Reſpect, as become the Vicegerents of that God, *by whom Kings reign, and Princes decree Juſtice.* (*b*) And the ſame Principle will likewiſe have its proper Influence upon the Allegiance of Subjects, by inducing them to be obedient, *not only for Wrath, but for Conſcience Sake*; as knowing, that *the Powers that be, are of God*; and that *they who reſiſt ſhall receive to themſelves Damnation.* (*c*) The Reſtraints laid upon Men by Religion, are of ſuch univerſal Extent, that they accommodate themſelves to every Degree and Relation, to every Action and Purſuit of Life; for when a Man firmly believes, that *God will bring every Work into Judgment, with every ſecret Thing*, (*d*)

(*a*) *Exod.* xxii. 28. and *Pſ.* lxxxii. 6. (*b*) *Prov.* viii. 15.
(*c*) *Rom.* xiii. 1, 2, 5. (*d*) *Eccleſ.* xii. 14.

and that *for every idle Word he muſt give an Account*; (*a*) This will keep him honeſt in the Dark; This Belief will outweigh all Temptations to indirect Dealing, and effectually reſtrain him from committing ſuch Crimes, as are any way injurious to the Peace and Welfare of his Fellow Creatures.

2dly. The good Influence of Religion upon Society, will appear ſtill more plainly, by an Induction of Particulars; and by conſidering the natural Tendency of thoſe Virtues, and Vices, which are commanded, and forbidden by it, both in reſpect of our Neighbours, and Ourſelves.

1. With regard to our Neighbours; it is certain, that nothing better could be invented for promoting the Happineſs of publick Societies, than thoſe Duties which are enjoined by Religion. For if a dutiful and ſubmiſſive Behaviour to Superiors of ever Kind; if ſtrict Juſtice and Honeſty in all our Dealings; if the *ſpeaking Truth every Man to his Neighbour*; (*b*) if a ſincere Endeavour after Peace and Unity; if Contentment with our Condition, and a conſcientious Diſcharge of our reſpective Callings, in that State of Life Providence hath placed us; in a Word, if univerſal Love, and Benevolence, and doing to all Mankind, as we would have them do to us, be deſirable Qualifications;

(*a*) *Matt.* xii. 36. (*b*) *Epheſ.* iv. 25.

fications; and if they highly contribute to the Peace, and good Order, to the Quiet and Happineſs of a People; theſe then are the Duties which Religion requires of all its Proſelytes. And could but all the Members of Society be perſwaded, to put theſe Rules in Practice, what a bleſſed Change of Times ſhould we ſoon ſee? And what an uninterrupted Proſperity would ſuch a Behaviour produce?

But on the other Hand, were Envy and Malice, were Pride and Injuſtice univerſally to take Place; and ſhould Fraud and Perjury, Bribery and Covetouſneſs, become the general Practice among Men; what a diſmal Scene of Affairs would this in a ſhort Time introduce? Liberty would then degenerate into the worſt Sort of Licentiouſneſs, and Property be meaſured by the Length of a Man's Sword; Confuſion would overſpread the Face of the Earth, and the Kingdoms of this World reſemble the Kingdoms of Darkneſs, be filled with Rage and Fury, Horror and Deſpair.

2. With reſpect to Ourſelves; Religion teacheth us ſuch Virtues, as eminently tend to advance both our perſonal and ſocial Happineſs; for as Communities are compoſed of Individuals, whatever promotes the one, muſt of Conſequence advance the other, in the ſame Proportion. Are Temperance and Sobriety a ſure Means of promoting the Health and Happineſs of a ſingle Man? In like Manner, are they naturally

naturally productive of a good Order, and a ſound Conſtitution in the Commonwealth. Do Induſtry and Frugality naturally tend to make a private Perſon thrive in the World? So will they likewiſe cauſe a Kingdom to flouriſh in Riches and Plenty. But the contrary Vices of Luſt and Intemperance, of Luxury and Idleneſs, conſume both the Wealth and Strength of a Nation; they ſoften and enervate a People, and make them contemptible; they introduce Poverty and a Meanneſs of Spirit, and theſe tempt Men to be falſe and corrupt, and to purſue their private Ends by treacherous and diſhoneſt Means, and that diſſolves all Juſtice, and mutual Confidence, which are the very Bonds of Society, and introduces a numberleſs Train of Evils and Misfortunes to a State.

Thus it is obvious, from the natural Tendency of the Thing, that *Righteouſneſs exalteth a Nation*, that Virtue and Religion lay the ſureſt Foundation for the Proſperity of a People at Home, and their Credit and Reputation Abroad; both by diſpoſing Princes, and ſubordinate Magiſtrates to govern well; and their Subjects to render a ready and willing Obedience; and by implanting ſuch Virtues in all the Members of Society, as will naturally produce Peace, and Plenty, and every other Bleſſing to a Commonwealth.

And on the other Hand, that Irreligion, and Wickedneſs not only bring a *Reproach*, but Ruin

Ruin *upon any People*; inaſmuch as they tend, either to the Diſſolution of all Government, or elſe to the corrupting, and enfeebling it in ſuch a Manner, as to become contemptible in the Eyes of the World, and an eaſy Prey to Tyranny and Oppreſſion.

3. This Account of Things agrees exactly with the Methods of the Divine Providence, and the Hiſtory, and Experience of all Nations; and clearly evinces the Juſtice of God's Adminiſtration in his Government of the World. For whoever believes a God, muſt believe likewiſe, that he is pure, and holy, and juſt, and good; and that in conſequence of this, he muſt, and will proſper virtuous Men, and puniſh the Wicked; for thus himſelf hath declared, that *thoſe that honour him, he will honour; and thoſe that deſpiſe him, ſhall be lightly eſteemed.* (*a*) And according to this Rule, are the general Diſpenſations of his Providence. It muſt indeed be acknowledged, that ſingle Perſons are not always thus dealt with in this World; becauſe we often ſee Wickedneſs rioting in the Midſt of Luxury and Plenty; Virtue languiſhing under various Kinds of Affictions; and good Men toſſed about in a Sea of Troubles and Misfortunes all their Life long: Neither is this ſeemingly croſs Adminiſtration of Affairs inconſiſtent with the Juſtice and Goodneſs of *the great Judge of all the Earth:* (*b*) Becauſe

(*a*) 1 *Sam.* ii. 30. (*b*) *Gen.* xviii. 25.

Becauſe particular Perſons being in their own Nature immortal, there will be a ſufficient Opportunity in a future State, of rendring to them a juſt Retribution according to their Deeds. But the Merits, or Demerits of Nations can no other way be conſidered, but by preſent Rewards, or Puniſhments in this World; becauſe all publick Societies ſhall be diſſolved in a future State; and therefore the Juſtice of God makes it neceſſary, that they ſhould be puniſhed, or rewarded here in their political Capacity; and be in a flouriſhing, or declining Condition, in proportion to the Goodneſs, or Badneſs of their Manners.

And accordingly, both ſacred and profane Hiſtory furniſh us with innumerable Examples of this Kind, in the various Turns and Revolutions of Kingdoms; in which it is eaſy to obſerve, that their Succeſſes, and Misfortunes have always proceeded from theſe good, or bad Cauſes. Never was any Nation remarkable for Juſtice, Temperance, and Severity of Manners, but what always proſpered, and grew great in the World: And on the other Hand, when the ſame People have fall'n from their former Virtue, and ſunk into Perfidiouſneſs and Treachery, into Riot, Luxury, and Diſſoluteneſs, they have always proportionably declined in their Wealth, Reputation and Proſperity.

Of this we have a remarkable Inſtance, in the Riſe and Downfall of the *Roman* Commonwealth.

wealth. That People raiſed themſelves from a mean and low Original, to the moſt ſurprizing Pitch of Grandeur, by treading in the Paths of ſtrict Virtue: And they long maintained their Empire over the World, by the ſame good Arts which advanced them to it. And tho' in the Courſe of their Hiſtory, we find that they received ſeveral Shocks from Avarice and Ambition; yet ſo long as Virtue inflamed the Spirits of their Patriots to noble Atchievments for the Benefit of the Commonwealth; and ſo long as the People in general were animated with a plain, honeſt, and rough Spirit for the publick Good, they always proſpered; and every new Inſtance of publick Virtue, was not only a Support, but a freſh Addition to their Greatneſs. But when Luxury began to be introduced, and both Senators and Citizens fell into Courſes of Vice and Debauchery, they were ſoon ſoftened into Sloth and a degenerate Temper, they loſt all publick Spirit, and Love of Liberty, and their Country; the Provinces were drained with Taxes to ſupport their Extravagance; Luxury introduced Poverty, and that tempted to, and made way for Venality and Corruption, for Fraud and Treachery; So that the *Punica Fides*, for which their neighbouring Rival Commonwealth had been ſo much branded, became at laſt the Standard of *Roman* Credit; and publick Offices, without any Regard had to the Merit of the Candidates, were openly ſold to the beſt Bidder. By which Means it came to paſs, that the Tribunes, who

ſhould have been the Guardians of the Common People's Liberty, againſt the Encroachments of overgrown Power, gave Way to the Temptations of Wealth and Profit; and the People were likewiſe betrayed by the ſame Allurements; and both joined in ſelling their Country: 'Till at laſt, that brave People, who were once the univerſal Patrons of the Liberties of Mankind, thro' their Vices and Corruptions, fell into the moſt abject State of Slavery; and their Laws, Liberties, and Lives were all ſacrificed by private Avarice, to the arbitrary Wills of Tyrants and Oppreſſors.

But the moſt remarkable Diſpenſations of Providence, are to be met with in the Hiſtory of the *Jewiſh* Nation; which is a continued Series of Judgments, and Deliverances, in conſequence of their Virtues, and Vices. They conſtantly proſpered while Piety and Religion flouriſhed among them; and were as conſtantly puniſhed upon every Defection: Every Degree of publick Virtue, was rewarded with a like Degree of publick Happineſs; and whenever that People forſook God, *the Rock of their Salvation*, and fell into Idolatry and a Corruption of Morals, they were always delivered over to Captivity and Slavery, and oppreſſed with heavy Loads of Affliction. Thus did Providence obſerve an exact Proportion between their Impieties, and their Puniſhments: And at laſt, when they grew worſe under Judgments and Calamities, and arrived to a Pitch of Wickedneſs,

neſs, beyond the Reach of Correction, they were in the moſt dreadful Manner utterly extirpated.

In this Manner did God deal with his antient favourite People the *Jews*; and we may ſafely conclude from the Immutability of his Juſtice, that he will always deal thus, with all States and Nations whatſoever. He hath *ſet before them Life, and Death, Bleſſing, and Curſing*: (*a*) If they are eminent for Virtue and Piety, they ſhall meet with Succeſs and Proſperity in all Things; but if they notoriouſly *ſin againſt the Lord, Iniquity will* moſt certainly *be their Ruin*. (*b*) So true is the Aſſertion of *Solomon* in the Text, that *Righteouſneſs exalteth a Nation; but Sin is a Reproach to any People*.

Having thus proved the Truth of the Propoſitions contained in the Text; I will now proceed in the

II. Place, to draw an uſeful Inference or two, from what has been ſaid.

1. It is obvious to infer, how much it concerns every Magiſtrate, to ſupport the Honour of Religion; becauſe a firm Belief of the great Truths thereof, contribute ſo much to the Encouragement of Virtue, and to the rendring every Member of Society, ready upon all Occaſions

(*a*) *Deut.* xxx. 19. (*b*) *Ezek.* xviii. 30.

caſions to diſcharge thoſe Duties which he owes to Mankind as a ſocial Creature. For there is no other Principle whatever, either of Extent enough to take in all poſſible Caſes, or of Influence ſufficient to ſecure the good Order of the World, excluſive of Religion: Not all the Tricks of *Machiavel*, not all the myſterious Arts of the moſt cunning Stateſman, not all the Slight and Fetches of worldly Craft, are of any Signification, when compared to this one, plain, and eaſy Way of ſecuring the Intereſts of Government, by ſupporting thoſe of Religion. And therefore every prudent Magiſtrate, tho' he had no Regard to Religion himſelf, conſidered in a private Capacity; yet if he had any Value for the Quiet and Happineſs, the Honour and Reputation of the Society to which he belongs, would think himſelf highly concerned to ſupport its Belief and Influence in the Minds of his Subjects. The great inſpired Lawgiver of the *Jews*, thought Religion ſo neceſſary to preſerve and advance the Dignity and Credit of his Government in the Eyes of other Nations, as well as its Peace and Proſperity at Home, that he does not ſcruple to recommend the Obſervation of God's Laws in theſe Terms, *Keep therefore and do them, for this is your Wiſdom and your Underſtanding in the Sight of the Nations, which ſhall hear all theſe Statutes, and ſay, Surely this great Nation, is a wiſe and underſtanding People.* (a)

And

(a) *Deut.* iv. 6.

And as the Relief and Influence of Religion can no other way be preſerved, but by frequent Acts of publick Worſhip, by educating and inſtructing Youth in the Principles thereof, by explaining and enforcing its Duties by proper Arguments upon grown Perſons, and by rewarding thoſe that are eminent for Virtue and Piety with diſtinguiſhing Marks of Honour; ſure then, thoſe Men who are ſet apart for theſe good Offices, and who faithfully and prudently endeavour to diſcharge them; thoſe Perſons who diſtinguiſh themſelves by a ſtrict and ſteady Adherence to Religion, muſt be looked upon as the moſt uſeful Members of the Commonwealth, and as ſuch, may juſtly claim the Countenance and Protection of every wiſe Magiſtrate.

2*dly*. If it be ſo much the Concern of the Civil Magiſtrate to encourage Virtue and Religion; it will on the contrary, no leſs concern him, to diſcourage Vice and Irreligion; becauſe they are confeſſedly of ſuch pernicious Conſequence to a State, and open ſuch an effectual Gap to the greateſt Diſorders. For not to inſiſt upon impious and corrupt Nations being Objects of the Divine Diſpleaſure, it is certain from Experience, and the natural Tendency of Things, that as Virtue and Piety *decay among a People*, in the ſame Degree will the Order and Happineſs of ſuch a Society decline, and its national Credit and Proſperity decay likewiſe.

If

If we ſhould ſee an open Diſregard of Religion, and an avowed Contempt for every Thing ſerious and ſacred, take Place almoſt univerſally among a People; ſhould we find Perſons of the higher Rank, entirely diſſolute, and Contemners of all Principles; and thoſe of the lower, profligate, intemperate, and fearleſs in committing Crimes; it would be no Wonder, that ſuch a People ſhould gradually ſink into every Kind of Wickedneſs, and every Degree of Corruption, the moſt fatal and injurious to their ſocial Happineſs; that they ſhould be miſerable and divided among themſelves, and hated and deſpiſed by their Neighbours. For when Men look upon themſelves to be under no Religious Obligations, *as much as lies in them to live in Peace* and Unity one with another, (*a*) it is no Wonder, they ſhould liſt into Parties, to gratify private Reſentments, or to purſue private Intereſts, and that Societies ſhould be torn in Pieces, by inteſtine Conteſts and Diviſions. When Religion is not only neglected, but even deſpiſed, it is no ſtrange Thing, that it ſhould be proſtituted to baſe and mean Deſigns, be made the Inſtrument of Party-Wrangling, and of conveying Rancour and Bitterneſs of Spirit. When Covetouſneſs and a mercenary Temper are introduced into a Nation, when contrary to the Apoſtolical Precept *every one ſeeks his own, but not another's Wealth*,

(*a*) *Rom.* xii. 18.

Wealth, (*a*) we need not be ſurprized at the univerſal Decay of publick Spirit, and that the Good of the Commonwealth ſhould entirely be ſacrificed to private Views of perſonal Profit and Advantage: When inſtead of *ſtudying to be quiet, and mind their own Buſineſs*, (*b*) Men forwardly thruſt themſelves into the Province of their Governors, and impertinently cenſure the Conduct of their Superiors; we may then reaſonably expect, that Faction and Diſcontent will ſhew themſelves in ten thouſand Shapes, and threaten ſuch a People with the dreadful Proſpect of publick Miſery and Diſtraction: And when Men have once caſt off the *Fear of God*, *their Honour* and Allegiance to *the King* will ſtand upon a very precarious Foundation.

It is plain then to a Demonſtration, of what conſiderable Importance Religion is, to the Happineſs of Civil Society; and what a pernicious Tendency Vice and Irreligion have to the contrary: And that therefore it is not the Concern of the Clergy alone to diſcountenance Impiety, and to oppoſe the Overflowings of Wickedneſs; but it is the common Concern of all Men, *who deſire to live well, and would fain ſee good Days*; (*c*) and eſpecially it is the Concern, and ought to be the Care of Magiſtrates, of Perſons of Rank and Quality, who have conſiderable Intereſts in the World, if they would ſecurely enjoy their Dignity and Wealth, by

(*a*) 1 *Cor.* x. 24. (*b*) 1 *Theſſ.* iv. 11. (*c*) *Pſ.* xxxiv. 12.

by all Means to diſcourage Vice and Immorality. And it is the worſt Policy imaginable, for Men of Birth and Fortune to make Religion the Object of their Ridicule, and to endeavour to bring it into Contempt; becauſe if this ſhould become the univerſal Practice, they themſelves would be the greateſt Sufferers by it. For ſhould the Common People take it into their Heads, to imitate their Betters in this Particular, as they are very apt to do in moſt others; ſhould they ſhake off all Dread of another World, it would be next to impoſſible to keep them long in Subjection by the Terrors of this; but in all Probability, a leveling Scheme would ſoon be projected, and as *they* are the greateſt Number in all Governments, I cannot ſee what could hinder them from putting it in Execution.

All Attempts therefore, either to corrupt Religion, or to weaken its Authority, ought to be looked upon as ſo many Attempts againſt the Peace of the State, and be reſented by the Magiſtrate accordingly; and that, whether ſuch Attempts are openly made by Atheiſts, and Libertines, or more indirectly, by the Enthuſiaſtical and Superſtitious. I would not here be underſtood to ſpeak againſt a Toleration of thoſe, who ſeparate from the Religion eſtabliſhed, out of a real Motive of Conſcience; and who, by the Wiſdom of Parliament, are eſteem'd the proper Objects of it: But ſure nothing can be pleaded in Excuſe, for ſuch Perſons as are

Enemies

Enemies to all Religion; nor any Obligations of Conſcience be pretended, for thoſe Men, who endeavour to perſwade both themſelves, and others, that they have no Conſciences at all. Neither will the Attacks of Deiſts upon Revealed Religion ſquare any better with that Generoſity and Benevolence they ſo much boaſt of: For if the Precepts of Chriſtianity, be really of ſuch conſiderable Importance to Society, as hath been repreſented; if they have confeſſedly ſuch a beneficial Influence upon all Human Affairs; then ſurely, they who would deprive us of this Religion, whoſe Comforts and Benefits we have ſo long experienced, muſt be looked upon, not as the generous Benefactors, but the common Enemies of Mankind.

In like manner, it muſt be acknowledged, that the Spreaders of Enthuſiaſm, the Broachers of Heretical Doctrines, and all other Corrupters of Religion, are of pernicious Conſequence to Society: Becauſe in the ſame Degree that the Religion of a Country is corrupted, will a proportionable Degree of Corruption be introduced into the Morals of its Profeſſors, and this, in the ſame Proportion, will affect the Intereſts of Government. And tho' it may be good Policy, to tolerate different Opinions, after they have been largely propagated, and are become numerous; eſpecially, if they be ſuch, as are conſiſtent with the Peace and Quiet of the State, and the Honour of Religion in general: Yet nevertheleſs, I ſuppoſe no Man will ſay,

that it can be for the Benefit and good Order of any Political Society, to encourage, or if poſſible, even to permit the Spreading of *new* Sects; and particularly, if they are ſuch, as from the Nature of their Tenets, are a Diſgrace to, and deſtructive of, all Religion, and not able to give a ſufficient Security for their peaceable and quiet Behaviour in the State.

Now Enthuſiaſts, being a Sort of People, who are governed by no Kind of ſettled Principles, but only Fancy, are always ready to embrace the moſt extravagant Errors, and conſequently to run into the moſt extravagant Actions: Whatever groundleſs Opinion comes to ſettle itſelf ſtrongly in their Minds, is preſently looked upon to be of Divine Authority, to be an Illumination from the Spirit of God; and whatever odd Action they find in themſelves a ſtrong Propenſity to perform, that Impulſe is concluded to be a Call from Heaven, and muſt therefore directly be obeyed. (*a*) Thus having no Rule, but Fancy; nor any Principles, but the Conceits of a warm Brain, and an overheated Imagination, they are inconſtant as the Wind, and cannot promiſe for themſelves for an Hour together; and conſequently, when they become numerous, are as dangerous in any Government, as Elephants in Army, where, if their Heads are once turned, they preſently fall

(*a*) Lock *on Hum. Under. Vol.* 2. *Chap* xix.

fall foul upon their Leaders. (*b*) And indeed, Experience has ſhewn us, that no Libertines whatſoever, have gone greater Lengths in Miſchief of all Kinds, than Enthuſiaſts; a profeſſed Atheiſt does not purſue Wickedneſs with half *their* Zeal and Fury: And tho' it be reaſonable to ſuppoſe, that a profligate Perſon will ſtick at Nothing, how unlawful ſoever; yet in this, he is exceeded by the Enthuſiaſt, becauſe he often is thoroughly perſwaded, that the very worſt Action he can commit, is not only lawful, but his Duty; and ſo is hurried on to the Commiſſion of it with the greater Vehemence. Every wiſe Government therefore will have a watchful Eye upon all Advances towards Irreligion, let them proceed from what Quarter they will; and will eſteem it highly neceſſary, both out of Reſpect to the Honour of God and Religion, and the Quiet and Peace of the State, to reſtrain ſuch evil Spirits, and by all prudent Means to prevent the Spreading of ſuch pernicious Errors: And tho' this Reſtraint may, and perhaps will be called Perſecution, yet it is ſuch a Kind of Perſecution, as no honeſt Man need be aſhamed to plead for.

To conclude, ſince *Virtue* and *Vice* are the great Cauſes of the publick Happineſs and Miſery of Nations; let us be perſwaded to acknowledge this great Truth; That our Virtues will always prove our beſt Friends, and that

(*b*) *Snake in Graſs, Sect.* vii. *p.* 98.

no Enemies we can have, are half so dangerous to us as our Vices and Corruptions. And let this Consideration at last prevail upon us, to be ashamed of those Sins which have such a direct Tendency to our Ruin. Let us be perswaded to forsake those Crimes, which if pursued, will not only make us ripe for Destruction, but an easy Prey to the most despicable Enemy that can attack us. And lastly, as we tender our own present Happiness, and desire that the Blessings of Peace and Liberty may be derived down to our latest Posterity; if we have any Regard for the Honour and Welfare of our Native Country; as we would approve ourselves good Subjects to the Gracious Prince upon the Throne; and as we value the Preservation of our most happy Establishment both in Church and State; let us every one, in our several Stations, pay an inviolable Regard to the Honour of Religion. Let us but resolve to become Christians in Deed and in Truth, as well as in Name and Profession, and then, screened under the Protection of the Almighty, we may safely defy all the Contrivances of foreign and domestick, of open and secret Enemies; both of *those*, who would enslave us on the one Hand, and of *those*, who under Pretence of introducing greater Liberty, would divide and throw us into Confusion on the other: and in all Dangers and Distresses may most securely rely upon that good Providence, which hath so often, and so visibly interposed in our Defence. We may then reasonably hope to enjoy the Blessings of Peace, Liberty, and Prosperity in this World; and to be crown'd with immortal Happiness in the World to come, for Jesus Christ's Sake, to whom with the Father, and Holy Spirit, be ascribed all Honour, Glory, and Obedience, now, and for ever. *Amen.*

F I N I S.

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